

ASIAN LADY BEETLES

By spring and summer, they are a gardener's best friend, gobbling undesirable aphids and scale insects that attack gardens and crops. But by fall, Asian lady beetles metamorphosis into a homeowner's headache.

IDENTIFYING THE DECOR

Asian lady beetle color varies widely from tan to orange to red. Some have several black spots while others have none. Multi-spotted individuals tend to be females, those with few or no spots, males. Most Asian lady beetles have a small, dark "M" or "W"-shaped marking behind their head.

NOBLE BUGS OR NUISANCES

Originally introduced in the 1960s to protect apple and pecan crops in a handful of Southern and East Coast states, Asian lady beetles have since spread across much of the U.S. They are an effective, natural alternative to plant insect control. Despite that, their unsightly and offensive presence in the home has relegated them to nuisance status. Occasionally, adults get a "sweet tooth," says Laura Jesse, entomologist with Iowa State University Extension, and seek sugary treats, damaging grape and other fruit crops.

PROLIFIC PROPAGATORS

Unlike other indoor pests, like flees and cockroaches, they do not reproduce indoors. Outdoors, however, they lay 300 to 500 eggs on undersides of leaves, and each adult female can produce multiple generations per year. Individual beetles can live up to three years.

TIME FOR A MIGRATION

The first 70 degree-plus day following a fall cold front is when Asian lady beetles begin their annual migration to houses to hibernate, says Jesse. The lucky ones find an inviting attic, wall cavity or other protected area to over winter. The rest collect post partum, en masse, on window seals, countertops and floors. Asian lady beetles are the only beetles attracted to light, which might explain why they congregate on sunlit exterior walls and window seals. That might also explain why the homeward bound beetles are of the imported Asian variety, not native ladybugs.

JUST STAY OUT OF MY HOUSE

There is no quick fix to lady beetle invasions. Although laborious and sometimes impractical, caulking entry points is the most permanent solution to keeping pests out. An added benefit is reduced energy costs. Exterior pesticides can be effective, albeit costly, and require multiple application. Indoor insecticides are mostly ineffective and can leave unsightly residue.

DIRTY, SMELLY DEFENSE

Although sub-freezing temperatures and parasitic wasps may claim a few, lady beetles have few natural enemies. In the face of danger, they emit an acrid, yellow fluid from their leg joints. That smelly "reflex bleeding" stains walls, fabrics and furnishings.